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STATEMENT

by

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In September 2010 we will celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration on the equal status of women. What has changed in the women's position around the world since the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women?

First of all, within the last 15 years the issues of domestic violence, violence against women and human trafficking have become social issues known to a wide public and ceased to be merely private problems of the victims – which is evidenced, for instance, by the UN campaign involving men in the fight for women's basic right to freedom and life without violence.

The conference and the programming document, together with the declaration on the improvement of women's status, was a ground-breaking step. Then, for the first time, the expression “gender mainstreaming” appeared in documents of such importance. It has since then entered the political discourse for good, and the gender-related issues have become part of the government agendas. It is something that we should be proud of – as it fulfills the wishes of the Beijing Declaration signatories who wanted the equal treatment of women to be not just a women's issue. In 1996, also the European Union adopted the gender mainstreaming approach as its horizontal policy.

The Polish government attempts to implement gender mainstreaming in many various ways. The actions of the Polish government related to the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men are aimed at the activities connected with the improvement of the women's status, equal of opportunities for women and men in the labour market, counteracting gender stereotypes present in the Polish society, as well as promoting and popularizing the issue of gender equality. The majority of projects and campaigns conducted by the government in the media concerns professional activation of women in the labour market, reconciliation of professional career and family life, as well as equal opportunities for men and women in the labour market.

Within the framework of the Initiative Competition for Non-Governmental Organisations, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy co-finances activities of non-governmental organisations, among others, in the area of equal opportunities for women in the economic and social life under the measure entitled *Promoting women's participation in the public life*. Promoting women's participation in the decision-making process strengthens their position in the public sphere, both at the central and the local level.

Fifteen years after the World Conference on Women in Beijing it is clear that the equality of women and men is a civilisation development process, which appears wherever social dialogue, civic society and budget surplus exist. As it was shown by the last two Congresses of Polish Women – organised 20 years after the transition of Poland's political system – some processes cannot be stopped, they can only develop.

The Congresses of Polish Women held in June 2009 and 2010 gathered around 6 000 Polish women “beyond divisions”, representing: the government, the Parliament, business, academia, non-governmental organisations, employees and employers’ associations, and the media. The organisation of the Congresses was supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with the European Union funds.

The measures taken by the first Congress are being continued, for example, by means of organisation of regional conferences, provided for in the project: *Socio-economic activation of women on regional and local levels*.

Such issues as increasing women’s employment, supporting their entrepreneurship, reconciling family and professional life, or increasing their participation in the decision-making processes are not alien to the participants in the public debate anymore. What instigates the concerns of country leaders nowadays are rather the low ratios achieved in these fields. On the average women constitute approximately 20% of national parliaments – still not enough to influence the most important decisions on the State level. On the average only 60% of women are active in the labour market. In terms of GDP this share is considerable, yet in terms of human capital – not enough.

Fifteen years ago the participants to the Fourth World Conference on Women expressed their conviction that women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.

The participants signed the Beijing Declaration, which stated that the increasing poverty is affecting the situation of women. They also reaffirmed their commitment to overcome the difficulties. Today, with economic crisis at large, this commitment becomes even more compelling. Women are more threatened by poverty than men are.

Fifteen years ago equal rights of women and men, equal opportunities and access to resources, equal share of responsibilities in the family and a harmonious partnership between woman and man were declared critical to the well-being of the family, as well as to the consolidation of democracy. Not only is gender equality relative to the issues of diversity and social justice, but it also constitutes a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable economic growth, employment, competitiveness and social cohesion. Investments in gender equality policies result in higher employment rate of women, their higher GDP share, income from taxes and stable Total Fertility Rates. Equality of women and men has proven to be a stable answer to challenges old and new. Therefore, the gender equality policy should be treated as a long-term investment rather than a short-term liability.

Thank you very much.